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GOVERNOR GEORGE THOMAS WOOD

LOUELLA STYLES VINCENT

Through fire and other uncontrollable vicissitudes the Wood family records have been destroyed so that most that is known of the Governor is in the recollection of his only living child, Mrs. Albea, who was fifteen years of age at the time of her father's death. For ten years she has been talking to this writer in familiar friendliness and from time to time has given the facts here set forth. On September 7, 1916, Mrs. Albea carefully scanned these data and pronounced them accurate to her best knowledge and belief.

George Thomas Wood was born in Georgia. His father, whose name is not recalled, died when the son was five years of age. His mother was Elizabeth Burris Wood. He was in the Creek War and bore indelible scars from Indian arrows. His commissary was Captain Byrd M. Grace, who also moved to Texas. Mr. Wood was in business in Cuthbert, Georgia, and is supposed to have been in the Georgia legislature when he met Mrs. Martha Evans Gindrat, whom he married at her home in Milledgeville, September 18, 1837.

In 1839, the family decided to move to Texas, and to that end took boat down the Chattahoochee to Apalachicola, Florida, where Mr. Wood chartered a sloop and set sail for the West. Fortunately this charter has survived the years, and is reproduced in full herewith. The script is precise and exquisite like copper plate.

This Charter party, intended and made between John Steib mariner and master of the sloop called the Marshall, now in the port of Apalachicola, of the burthen of Sixty Tons or thereabouts of the One part, And George T. Wood of the other part, Witnesseth that the said John Steib, for the consideration hereinafter mentioned, hath granted and to freight letten, and by these presents doth grant and to freight let, unto the said George T. Wood, his Executors, Administrators, and assigns, the whole tonnage of the hold, Skow, sheets, and half deck. And Cabin of the said sloop called the Marshall, from the port of Apalachicola to Galveston in Texas in a voyage to be made by the said John Steib with the said sloop in manner hereinafter mentioned (that is to say) to sail

with the first fair wind and weather that shall happen after the sixteenth day of the present month, February, from the port of Apalachicola, with the family and Slaves of the said George T. Wood and such freight as the said George T. Wood may think proper to stow on board the said sloop (the Accidents of the seas, norms, and navigation of whatever kind and nature as ships are liable thereto, during the said voyage always Excepted), and there land, unlaid and discharge the said family and Slaves of the said George T. Wood as also such goods, Wares, Chattels or Merchandize as the said George T. Wood may load on the said Sloop. It is further agreed and understood that the said John Steib is to furnish the family (Consisting of man and wife and four children) of the said George T. Wood with comfortable provisions such as passengers on board of such vessels trading to such places are usually found in. As also to furnish the slaves (about Thirty in number) in abundance with good, sound, and wholesome food. The Cabin of the said sloop to be surrendered to the said family and the cooking to be performed on deck. In consideration hereof the said George T. Wood, his heirs, Executors or assigns, shall well and truly pay and cause to be paid unto the said John Steib Six Hundred and fifty Dollars in current Floriday money to be paid previous to the commencement of the voyage above mentioned, the receipt whereof to be endorsed hereon. It is also further agreed and understood that the said sloop (if possible) is to sail from said port of Apalachicola within six hours after the family arrives in this place and are ready to go on board, and further more that the said John Steib is to pay all port Charges which may be incurred On the said vessel both in this port and that of Galveston, and doth further Covenant and grant to the said George T. Wood to keep or cause to be kept the said vessel in the same good order that she is now in at his own Charge, that is to say, stiff, staunch, strong, well appavelled, and furnished as well with men and mariners sufficient and able to sail, guide, and govern the said sloop as with all manner of rigging, boats, tackle, and apparel, furniture, provisions, and appurtenances fitting and necessary for the said men and mariners, and for the said ship during the voyage aforesaid. In witness whereof the parties above-mentioned do hereby subscribe their names and affix their seals at the City of Apalachicola this Sixth day of February in the year of our Lord Eighteen hundred and thirty-nine.

George T. Wood

Pr E. Simpson seal

John Steib seal

Witness,
H. D. Deadry

On the back of this foolscap page is the indorsement in another hand:

Apalachicola 16 Feby 1839

Received the within mentioned six hundred and fifty Dollars in full for the within charter.

John Steib

And on the back of the folded sheet are the words "Charter Party Sloop Marshall."

Of the four children mentioned in the charter three were Gin-drats and the fourth was little Georgia Anne Wood. Besides those mentioned, they were accompanied by Mr. Wood's widowed mother, and by a free negro who had chosen Mr. Wood as his guardian (as the law required): he was brought along and supported though never known to do any work except fishing in the 107 years of his life.

A severe gale carried the *Marshall* far out of her course, and during the protracted and tempestuous voyage all suffered from seasickness. The voyagers soon had enough of seafaring and were glad to dock at Galveston and bid Captain Steib farewell.

They settled in Houston, where Mr. Wood studied law and was admitted to the bar. He did not practice, however, but soon bought a plantation in what was then Liberty county, about a hundred miles north of Houston, near the Trinity river. Though this home was commodious, numerous cabins were built about the grounds to accommodate the overflow of guests attracted by the lavish Wood hospitality and cordial welcome.

Magnificent forest trees of many varieties adorned the premises, flowers bloomed in profusion everywhere, and there was a row of mulberry trees which Mrs. Wood brought from Georgia expecting to continue silk culture in which she had become expert, having woven material valued at ten dollars a yard. Many years afterwards these mulberries made an imposing view with their widespread branches and luxuriant foliage. At this home were born five children, two of whom died in early childhood, following the death of the daughter born in Georgia.

It is stated in history that Mr. Wood was in the Texas Congress and in the State Senate, but records of this service are not here accessible nor are the facts recollected by his daughter. He was authorized to organize a regiment for the Mexican War, and

was commissioned by Governor Henderson as Colonel of the Second Texas Cavalry Regiment of Volunteers. Colonel Wood and Colonel Jefferson Davis led their regiments through the Mexican War near each other. They were together at Monterey and the friendship continued through life. Once when President Davis was expected at a U. C. V. reunion in Texas, a letter from him was published far and wide expressing his disappointment at not being able to attend, and asking that he be remembered to any of Colonel Wood's Mexican War veterans who might be present.

While residing at this place, Colonel Wood was called to the governorship of Texas in 1847. He organized companies to protect the frontier from Indian depredation. The claims of Texas to Santa Fé were contested by the United States. The legislature passed a bill extending the laws of Texas over the disputed domain. "Gov. Wood thought Texas should take forcible possession of New Mexico, and asked that the whole military power of the State be placed at his disposal for this purpose." This territory was still in dispute at the close of Governor Wood's administration. In 1850 he went to Washington to help adjust the still heated question of the Texas boundary.

During her husband's stay at Austin, Mrs. Wood managed the plantation and conducted family affairs, only making one brief visit to the capital. The Governor made frequent visits to his home. After these eventful years, Governor Wood sold his plantation, reserving the right to the use of the cemetery. Another plantation was purchased about five miles farther up the Trinity and situated on the river bank.

Every planter along the river had a landing, and here was Wood's Landing, where steamboats frequently took on cotton and discharged foodstuffs, dry goods, and other supplies. When a boat was to stop at the landing, its whistle gave the signal and, whatever time of night or day it might be, most of the family, whites and blacks, would be standing around to enjoy the excitement when the boat arrived. One night the steamboat was the *James Jenkins*. The captain called to know if George T. Wood lived there. He had a Bible for Mrs. Wood. This treasure had been left among other heirlooms and valued furniture with neighbor

Johnson in Georgia, more than fifteen years before, to be forwarded whenever opportunity occurred, and now after all these years was put by a stranger safely into the owner's hands.

When steamboats stopped at Wood's Landing, they would sometimes take the children, white and black, on a cruise half a mile up the river to Patrick's Ferry, which was on the road leading from Huntsville to Louisiana. Having arrived at the Ferry, the children joyously tramped the dusty half mile back home.

The *Maryland* only plied the Trinity one season, being too large to turn at Wood's Landing. Every year some boat would summer at Patrick's Ferry to keep clear of the barnacles infesting salt water. Entertaining the officers of these steamboats and being entertained by them were among the exciting diversions of that time.

The family considered their place too close to the Trinity for health. It was here that the youngest child, Marshall, died, and the aged free negro, Uncle Tony. A new residence was built upon the hill two miles from the river. An Indian chief named Ben Ash had lived on this spot, and the home was named for him. There was a village of friendly Indians near here, and the Indians frequently visited the family on Ben Ash Hill. One of these was Billie Blount who wore a medal given his ancestor by the United States for service rendered at New Orleans under Andrew Jackson. Mr. Wood was often asked why he was building so large a house; he would answer, "For my friends." The building was still incomplete when he died, September 3, 1858. He was carried to the old cemetery and laid beside his little children. His mother survived him a year and was placed there to rest. Mrs. Wood died January 5, 1861, and was placed by her husband's side.

The three Gindrat children lived to rear families and leave their impress upon the State. Henry Abram Gindrat lived to be sixty years of age. David Shelton Gindrat, who was Mr. Wood's closest friend and counselor, lived to be eighty-one years of age. While the stepfather loved all the children, this one was dearest; they were to each other as David and Jonathan. Elizabeth Gindrat became Mrs. Walter Whitehead. George Tyler Wood lived to enlist in the Confederate army. He lay for months with

typhoid fever in a hospital at Sabine Pass from the effects of which he died January 5, 1869, never having regained his health. Mary, the only surviving child, was born January 5, 1843, and was married to Willis Burns Darby December 24, 1865. Of this union a daughter, Pearl, died upon reaching womanhood; two children survive, Prof. Willis Wood Darby with a son and daughter, and Mrs. S. E. Moss, who has a young son, Robert Cartwright, by an earlier marriage with the late Clinton Cartwright. Some years after Mr. Darby's death, his widow married Hon. C. P. Albea of Waco. Mrs. Albea, now a widow, with her children and grandchildren are residents of Dallas.

Mrs. Albea remembers her father most happily. He was six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds. His hair was straight and black, but turned gray. His portrait suggests the poet more than the warrior or statesman; his delicately chiseled lips especially denoting the idealist. He was always merry, laughing, jesting, and sustaining a mirthful atmosphere wherever he might be. He was kind and indulgent to family, slaves, and neighbors, indeed, to all the world. His favorite transportation was by muleback. Many Texans still remember his dark mule, Pantalette, which was a celebrated walker. During a journey, when time came for slumber, Mr. Wood tied Pantalette to his foot and with head upon his saddle slept in peace anywhere on the prairie.

His saddlebags were always full of good things for the home-folk, and he never failed to distribute candy at the big gate upon his return. Or if he rode in a vehicle it was running over with surprising gifts. The bottom of his buggy would be packed with blooming plants for Mary. Once he brought from a friend in Houston a big yellow chrysanthemum, the first she had ever seen of that size. When he came from Galveston there were sure to be all kinds of expensive, and often unsuitable luxuries, costly bonnets, bright hued garments. On one occasion there was a really beautiful pink velvet dress with cap, and boots to match, for the little daughter. Everybody on the place was not only permitted but encouraged to keep as many dogs, cats, horses and other pets as could be collected. Deer and turkeys were plentiful as well as all other wild game. Bear were quite common, and venison was an ordinary food.

The scars on Mr. Wood's legs made by arrows in the Creek War were texts for many Indian stories, which entertained the children. There were also many stories of the Mexican War. In one battle with the Mexicans a bullet was deflected from his body by his watch. After another battle Colonel Wood came across a little Mexican child which had been abandoned; he placed it in charge of a Mexican woman and for the two years that it lived sent means for its support.

Early in 1858 her father carried Mary to Galveston and placed her in Cobb Seminary. The boat conveying her was the *Governor Pease*. At the mouth of the Trinity it struck on a sand-bar and remained for several days before a tide washed it off. In June she returned on the *Bayou City*, a fine steamboat, fitted up luxuriously and giving elegant service for that day. She landed at Lynchburg, which was the shipping point for a large area of country, was met by her brother, and went by private conveyance across Tarkington's Prairie, stopping for the night at the Tarkington farm half way between Lynchburg and Cold Springs and twenty miles from Ben Ash Hill.

Mrs. Wood was born in 1809, so was five years of age when he was fighting with the Creeks. She was first cousin to General Clement C. Evans, and between them a familiar correspondence was carried on throughout her life. General Robert Toombs was among those personal friends of Colonel Wood whose letters were treasured for many years.

Mrs. Wood owned many negroes at the time of her marriage; thirty of them were brought to Texas; but Colonel Wood was never voluntarily a slave holder. He bought five negro men in New Orleans, and through pity for her condition purchased a negress and child from a neighbor. He considered slaves unsafe investments, believing that when the abolitionists should become sufficiently powerful slaves would be emancipated. When in Washington in 1850 he wrote to General Bee that abolition would be inevitable.

When the Wood negroes on Ben Ash Hill reached the side of their field adjoining that of a destitute neighbor, they cultivated both crops alike. When Governor Wood died after a brief illness, the owner of that field said to fifteen-year-old Mary, "Well, daughter, the poor man's friend is gone."

George Thomas Wood was a devoted husband, a tender and indulgent father, a warm and loyal friend, a kind neighbor, a lenient and considerate master, and was ever the chief charm in a most charming home. His friends came long journeys to enjoy his genial companionship and boundless hospitality. His daughter remembers no single meal in her father's home which was not shared with guests.

The monument under the moss garlanded Texas oaks says truly, "Here sleeps a just man," but even the tributes from those who survive to praise, those who knew and loved him, can give one but a faint idea of the fineness, the loveliness, the beauty and dash and glow of the real George T. Wood.